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## Coastlines

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### Biological Me

by Maria Lagasca

Part of my duty as a daughter is to love my mother even though she's a stone-cold liar. Hearing this, my mother wouldn't bat an eye. She remains ever so still and hard like a stone. No matter how many times I try to search for hope in those cold, numbing black eyes, I see what seems like another world where sympathy died a long time ago. Some days, I spot nothing at all. I like to believe her soft heart, if she had one, might have hard-boiled the moment she decided to keep my biological father a secret for fourteen years. For fourteen years, my mother put up a front, which she still refuses to tear down. But, part of my duty is still to love her. At least, that's what the world tells me. The world also teaches us to take everything and everyone at face value. I took the tan skinned man, my mother plotted in front of me as my father. He cooked me breakfast every morning. Rain, snow, or shine, my father walked me and my brother to the bus stop, and every day he was there to greet us in his red puffer coat when the bus dropped us off. His red puffer was the only way I could describe him the day my brother and I got separated shopping, and it was the only way the cops were able to find my father and reunite him with his kids. This man who had never missed dinner, a birthday party, a free pancake breakfast at school, or an uninspiring concert on world peace sung by third graders, was my father, or so I thought.

As I thought so highly of my mother and father, I missed, what I now see, were obvious clues to the truth. Lost in attachment for my family, I never cared to analyze the visual cues put in front of me. Ronnie, my younger brother, was born one late winter night. I remember frantically

running five blocks in freezing rain with my father, hand in hand. When I held Ronnie in my arms, I saw an Asian baby. He looked like me when I was a baby. Who would have known that this little Asian piglet would grow, in NASCAR speed, to be taller than me. This should have been the first clue. Kyle, my other brother, however, arrived via stork. Kyle suddenly appeared on our doorstep one Christmas. My parents immediately conveyed this light-skinned, brown hair (not the staple Asian black hair) boy was my brother. Hell, who was I to question my parents? My parents would never lie to me, it was purely impossible.

My mother's ability to lie became much more apparent with the revelation of other bigger clues. When Kyle and I were seven, a movie theatre opened near our house. We both had never been to a theatre and were begging to see *Batman and Robin*. My mother worked night shifts, so she slept most of the day and my father worked all the time, so my father's mother decided to take us to our very first movie. Long before my father's mother reached the front door, my brother and I were already dressed, waiting in anticipation. With the front door shutting behind my father's mother, Kyle and I started walking towards the theatre. However, before I exited my front yard, my father's mother told me she wouldn't be taking me. "You're not blood," was her explanation when I tearfully asked why.

When I asked my mother what "you're not blood" meant, she quickly told me to ignore my grandmother. I sincerely believed my mother and learned to dismiss the event. I also learned to dismiss the time my father's mother "accidentally forgot" to hang a stocking for me on Christmas. The following year she didn't have an excuse for why I didn't have a Christmas present. Surprisingly, neither did my mother. Moments like these, where my father's mother gifted my brothers with extravagant presents out of the blue, like brand new Huffy bicycles built with baskets and horns or

to simpler things such as candy or sugar cubes in tea, should have been the light revealing my mother's secret.

The light bulb moment, however, appeared only after moments of physical torment. While my parents were out, my father's mother came over to babysit. The rule in our house was to be home when it started to get dark. So when the sky darkened, Kyle and I ran home. I remember my brother beating me inside the house. I remember my father's mother welcoming me with shouts and screams. I remember her trying to grab me by the shirt and me escaping her grip. I remember her following me down the basement and again seizing my collar. Lastly, I remember her forcibly dragging me up the stairs on my back, as I screamed and frantically tried to keep hold of the rail. When I greeted my parents on the porch, where she most often threw me out, I received nothing. It took countless moments of me reflecting on my own sorrows in the puddle of tears I created on the concrete to finally start believing that my mother was lying. Sadly, these painful occurrences with my abuser and even more painful reunions with my parents always kept me up at night when I was a child.

Now twenty-seven, I'm mostly kept awake by the thoughts of my biological father's existence and what parts of me belong to him. When I hit puberty, I began to see a difference in my face. Unlike my brothers, my step-father, and my mother, my eyes are monolids or lack a crease. At one point, I thought all Asians had the same small, snake like eyes. After many trips to Chinatown, I realized I was ignorantly wrong. Some Asians, like my mother, had almond shaped eyes with a crease. Asian eyes can also be large, hooded, and sit far apart. My round face is also rather different from my family, who all have heart shaped faces. A feature I only came to observe when my daughter smiles, is a dimple on my left cheek. This dimple, unfound in my

mother, I've come to believe comes from my biological father. Thoughts of my biological father have not only changed the way I view my face, but also the entire Asian race, which was one aspect of my biological father that my mother was surprisingly willing to share.

As my mother ironed creases away, I confronted her about the differences between our faces. I even placed school photos of Kyle and Ronnie side by side to my photos. No response. "Mom, Kyle is lighter!" Still no response. I took Kyle's photo out, since I already knew we were not related, not even a little bit. With Ronnie's picture next to mine, I again asked my mother to look at the photo, pointing at the eyes. "Look mom, our eyes are different. He looks like dad and you, but I look like no one!" Still nothing. She continued to iron creases and wrinkles until they were nonexistent. "You can't keep lying to me. I'm not stupid!" I tried to remain strong, but the tears were winning. I wanted to grab the damn iron and throw it out of the room. I then wanted to grab my mother's face and make her look at me for once. "Stop ironing mom and look at me!" I've finally had enough. "Mom! Stop ironing! Look there's not even a crease in the shirt like there's no crease in my eyes!" I grabbed the corner of my eyes and stretched them out so she could see what I was talking about. "You know mom, how do I even know you're my mother, I don't look like you either!" Putting the iron down, never once making eye contact, she tells me my biological father is Korean.

Even though my mother continues to repeatedly lie to my face, I like to believe this detail is true. I ignorantly began assuming all Koreans had big swollen cheeks and squinty eyes like me. This method not only proved to be a failure, but was also rather racist. Koreans, like the rest of world, varied in physical features. In fact, I quickly learned how the entire Asian race varied extensively, which made it more difficult to identify my father. I thought the first Asian man I spotted who enjoyed hockey and writing short stories

of mermaids was my father. When no one fit that silhouette, I began to look for an Asian man who enjoyed kick ball and ginger ale. I even searched for a hotheaded Asian man with a dimple.

Five years ago, I obtained a copy of my birth certificate, but my father's name was blank. I was a bastard child. A few days later I stumbled upon my christening records and called the church, requesting the names of any of my godparents. Surprisingly, I received my godmother's name and number. Unfortunately, the number lead to someone who had no idea of my identity. I dug through boxes of my mother's past life of dancing and drinking next to an array of men. I studied each of the men in hopes that I may stumble upon someone who looked like me, but this journey was unsuccessful too. As I searched for more clues, I noticed many other characteristics of myself, which thanks to science, I've concluded come from my father.

Knowing that my brothers are actually my half-brothers doesn't make me love them any less. I also don't blame them for telling me to give up. I like to think this ability to love, no matter the ties that knit or separate us, comes from my biological father. Though there have been countless of nights of wondering and analyzing whether my family loved me, not one night was ever spent wondering whether I loved my family. This is true for my biological father too. Even though my mother told me my biological father wanted me aborted, I never once hated him. How could I?

Part of my duty as a daughter is to forgive my mother for lying and for hiding chunks of my soul. Even if she died tomorrow, never revealing a name, I still owe it to my mother to forgive. If I could forgive an unknown man for leaving, I could forgive a familiar woman for lying. But, I

also have a duty to myself. That journey, whether my mother likes it or not, requires every piece of information, no matter how heartbreaking it may be, to be discovered. I try to explain to them that this is not about being right or wrong. This never ceasing spirit embedded in my soul is also more than just getting my mother to finally confess. Instead and more importantly, this is about my identity, which my family, luckily have, but have naively forgotten. Unlike me, they have a window to their past and a totality of their entire being, while I am only left guessing.

I would like to know whether my conclusions are true. I'd like to know whether it was really my mother who didn't want me, which could explain why she shipped me to the Philippines immediately after I was born. Like her, I have decrees too. But unlike her, I'll wait until I know the truth before I break someone's heart. Though she crushed my heart and betrayed me more than anyone in this world, even more than my biological father if he truly abandoned me, I don't waste my time waiting for her to acknowledge the pain she has caused me. Yearning for the truth or for an apology, surprisingly, is not what I do every day because my mother taught me, from a very young age, to be strong and impassive like a stone.